

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0303

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: ELECTION ROUNDUP TWO FROM QUEBEC

REF: QUEBEC 280

1. QUEBEC'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS BEGUN TO TAKE ON A CHARACTER OF ITS OWN AS IT APPROACHES THE HALFWAY MARK. THE TWO PREVIOUS PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, IN 1970 AND 1973, WERE FOCUSED NARROWLY ON THE SINGLE ISSUE OF INDEPENDENCE. ALTHOUGH SEPARATION IS STILL A MAJOR ISSUE, IT IS NOT THE ONLY IMPORTANT ONE IN THIS ELECTION. CONTROVERSY OVER THE APPLICATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL TESTING REQUIREMENT FOR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN HAS BECOME HIGHLY EMOTIONAL WITHIN THE LIBERAL PARTS AND FOCUSED IN THE MONTREAL AREA. WIDESPREAD DISSATISFACTION WITH THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE AND WITH ITS INABILITY TO COPE WITH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS WHICH BESET THE SOCIETY HAVE ALSO BECOME MAJOR POINTS OF CONTENTION. THIS DIVERSIFICATION OF ISSUES IS DUE PARTLY TO THE AGGRESSIVE EFFORTS AND WELL CONCEIVED STRATEGY OF PARTI QUEBECOIS LEADER RENE LEVEEQUE. EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS THE RISE OF SMALL BUT AGGRESSIVE SPLINTER PARTIES FAVORING FEDERALISM WHICH MUST ATTACK THE GOVERNMENT AND BE ATTACKED ON GROUNDS OTHER THAN CONSTITUTIONAL. A THIRD FACTOR IN DIVERSIFICATION IS THE TARNISHED IMAGE OF THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF. TRY AS HE MAY, BOURASSA HAS NOT BEEN ABLE THUS FAR TO TURN THIS ELECTION INTO A REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE. HOWEVER, HE IS KNOWN

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AS A STRONG FINISHER.

2. ALTHOUGH MAINLY CONFINED TO THE MONTREAL AREA, THE MOST DRAMATIC SINGLE ISSUE OF THE CAMPAIGN IS THE DISPUTE OVER THE EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE TESTING PROVISIONS OF THE OFFICIAL (LANGUAGE ACT (BILL 22). ETHNICS AND ANGLOPHONES, WHO MAKE UP A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF VOTERS IN SOME 30 RIDINGS IN GREATER MONTREAL, HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR DEEP DISPLEASURE WITH THE BOURASSA GOVERNMENT OVER WHAT THEY VIEW AS INJUSTICE AND INDIFFERENCE THEY HAVE SUFFERED AT ITS HAND. PREVIOUSLY VIEWED AS PLIANT, RELIABLE LIBERAL VOTERS WHO NEEDED LITTLE CULTIVATION, THESE NON-FRANCOPHONES NOW MAY POSE A THREAT TO THE RETURN OF A LIBERAL MAJORITY.

SHOULD THE P.Q. SUCCEED IN GAINING SOME 30-35 SEATS AND, IN THE SAME STROKE, A LARGE NUMBER OF THE 30-ODD ANGLO AND ETHNIC INFLUENCED SEATS BE LOST BY THE LIBERALS TO THIRD PARTIES AND INDEPENDENTS, NO PARTY WOULD ENJOY A MAJORITY IN THE 110 SEAT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. WHILE MOST NON-FRANCOPHONES MAY IN THE END STILL BE VOTING LIBERAL AS THE ONLY WAY OF PREVENTING A SEPARATIST VICTORY, THIS IS NOW FAR FROM A SAFE ASSUMPTION. A GOOD MEASURE OF THE DEGREE TO WHICH LIBERALS ARE IN DISARRAY IN ANGLOPHONE RIDINGS IS THE FACT THAT CANDIDATES STILL HAVE NOT BEEN FOUND FOR THE TWO LEFT ISLAND RIDINGS OF ROBERT BALDWIN AND POINTE CLAIRE. THE INCLUSION OF BRYCE MACKASEY AND GEORGE SPRINGGATE AS LIBERAL CANDIDATES MAY INDUCE SOME RELUCTANT ANGLOPHONES TO SUPPORT THE PARTY. HOWEVER, THEIR WELL PUBLICIZED VIEWS ON LANGUAGE TESTING COULD HARM THE LIBERALS IN FRANCOPHONE RIDINGS AND WILL MAKE CONTROL OF A FUTURE LIBERAL CAUCUS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT FOR BOURASSA.

3. BOURASSA HIMSELF HAS BECOME THE FOCUS OF MUCH VOTER DISPLEASURE. IN HIS OWN RIDING OF MERCIER, HE HAS BEEN SEVERLY TAXED BY ETHNIC VOTERS ON THE APPLICATION OF BILL 22 AND FORCED TO CONCEDE THAT SOME ADJUSTMENTS MAY BE REQUIRED. ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE HE HAS ATTRACTED A VARIETY OF ANGRY DISSIDENTS. IN CHICOUTIMI, A SPEECH WAS DISRUPTED ON OCT 28 BY AGGRESSIVE DEMONSTRATORS. EARLIER, IN THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS, HE WAS SUBJECTED TO HECKLING AND BOOING. SOME OBSERVERS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT THE PREMIER MAY BE SECRETLY PLEASED BY THE ATTENTIONS GIVEN HIM BY GROUPS WHICH APPEAR IN

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NEWS MEDIA TO BE DISORDERLY. IT ENHANCES, THEY SAY, HIS IMAGE AS A DEFENDER OF LAW AND ORDER AND REINFORCES HIS ALLEGATION THAT MANY OF HIS CRITICS ARE DANGEROUSLY ANTI-SOCIAL.

4. THE MOST EXCITING EVENT OF THE WEEK WAS A RADIO DEBATE BETWEEN PREMIER BOURASSA AND P.Q. LEADER, RENE LEVESQUE, ON OCTOBER 24. THE DEBATERS WERE WELL MATCHED AND THE DISCUSSION ANIMATED. LEVESQUE WAS LATER VOTED AS HAVING WON THE

DEBATE BY 64 PERCENT OF THE RESPONDANTS IN AN "UNSCIENTIFIC" POLL HELD BY THE RADIO STATION. HOWEVER, BOURASSA MAY HAVE SCORED THE MORE IMPORTANT POINTS IN CHALLENGING LEVESQUE TO CITE "ONE CONCRETE CASE OF CORRUPTION" IN HIS GOVERNMENT, A CHALLENGE LEVESQUE REFUSED, AND BY FORCING LEVESQUE TO ADMIT THAT A SECOND INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM WOULD BE HELD SHOULD THE FIRST FAIL TO ACHIEVE A MAJORITY THUS PROLONGING A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY AND INSTABILITY.

5. RENE LEVESQUE, AS PART OF HIS TACTIC TO DIVERSIFY ISSUES, TO DEMONSTRATE P.Q. CONCERN FOR THE LITTLE PEOPLE, AND TO DEEMPHASIZE SEPERATISM, HAS PROPOSED A SERIES OF IMPROVEMENTS IN SOCIAL SERVICES RANGING FROM INDUSTRIAL SAFETY MEASURES TO A BROAD PROGRAM OF SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY. BOURASSA HAS CHALLENGED LEVESQUE ON HIS COMPUTATION OF THE COST OF THIS EXTENSIVE GRAB BAG. HOWEVER, DENIGRATING SANTA CLAUS HAS RARELY WON WIDE POPULAR SUPPORT EXCEPT AMONG THE LIMITED NUMBERS OF SCROOGES WHO VOTE.

6. UNION NATIONALE PRESIDENT RODRIGUE BIRON, HAS PROVEN TO BE THE MOST INDEFATIGABLE OF CAMPAIGNERS. HE HAS BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO THE VIRTUALLY MORIBUND UN WHICH NOW HAS FIELDDED SOME 100 CANDIDATES. IN RIDINGS WHERE DISCONTENT WITH LIBERALS IS HIGH BUT WHERE VOTERS REMAIN COMMITTED FEDERALISTS, UN APPEAL IS STRONG. THESE CONSTITUENCIES ARE MAINLY IN GREATER MONTREAL WITH ITS LARGE CONCENTRATION OF ANGLOS AND ETHNICS. HOWEVER, THE UN ALSO IS MOUNTING A STRONG CAMPAIGN AIMED AT ITS TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE CLIENTELLE IN PURAL AREAS. PROSPECTS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE SEEM LESS PROMISING - EVEN BIRON IS SAID TO BE RUNNING BEHIND HIS LIBERAL OPPONENT IN HIS OWN RIDING OF LOTBINIERE.

7. PARTI NATIONALE POPULAIRE LEADER, JEROME CHOQUETTE
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WAS REAFFIRMED AS PARTY PRESIDENT AT A CONGRSSS IN QUEBEC CITY ON OCTOBER 24. ASIDE FROM THE AILING COFOUNDER OF THE PARTY, FABIEN RAY, PROSPECTS FOR PNP CANDIDATES ARE NOT PROMISING. HOWEVER, THE VOTE IN MANY RIDINGS WILL BE DECIDED ON THE BASIS OF LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES. CANDIDATES LITTLE KNOWN OUTSIDE THEIR OWN CONSTITUENCIES AND WITHOUT BENEFIT OF MAJOR PARTY ENDORSEMENT MAY HAVE BETTER THAN USUAL CHANCE OF VICTORY.
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